



## Review

# Student nurse perceptions on evidence-based practice and research: An exploratory research study involving students from the University of Greenwich, England and the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice, Slovenia



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## SUMMARY

**Background:** The importance of evidence-based practice (EBP) and research within nursing has been acknowledged since the 1970s. Research proficiencies for nurses include the abilities to search for and evaluate evidence, disseminate findings and apply findings to practice within the context of caring. However, there is a lack of information on how new undergraduate nursing curriculums have impacted on student nurses' perceptions on and importance of EBP and research.

**Objectives:** The study aimed to explore student nurses' perceptions on and importance of EBP and research.

**Methods:** Data were collected via focus groups in 2013 with undergraduate student nurses from the University of Greenwich, England (n = 7) and the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice, Slovenia (n = 3). Cross-sectional sampling included focus groups with 1st year nursing students (4, n = 22), 2nd year (4, n = 38) and 3rd year (2, n = 10). Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

**Results:** Four emergent themes regarding students' perceptions of EBP and research were 'provided confidence, knowledge and empowerment in clinical practice', 'vital for improvements in patient care and safety', students' 'responsibility to develop nursing as a profession' and 'realities of research in clinical practice'.

**Discussion:** Student nurses found EBP and research daunting and difficult to understand, although perceived EBP and research as necessary for their current and future practice. However, student nurses highlighted the lack of clinical nurses' involvement in research and therefore struggled to conceptualise how they could maintain their EBP and research skills on leaving the academic setting.

**Conclusion:** The importance of EBP and research was realised by student nurses across the two institutions. However, further development and involvement of clinical nurses with EBP and research is required to enable students to develop a clear understanding of how to take these skills forward in their future careers.

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## Introduction

Evidence based practice (EBP) has been defined as the 'integration of the best research evidence with clinical expertise and the patient's unique values and circumstances' (Sackett et al., 2011). The International Council of Nurses (ICN) describe EBP as a problem solving approach for decisions made in clinical practice, which involves contemporary robust evidence, clinical expertise, holistic assessment and a consideration of the patients views and preferences within a caring approach (ICN, 2012).

The importance of EBP and research has been identified in nursing as far back as 1972. The Briggs Report (Department of Health and Social

Security, 1972) recommended nursing should become a 'research-based' profession. EBP and research has been fully integrated in pre-registration nursing curricula since 1980 in the UK (UKCC, 1986) and 1990 in Slovenia (Tierney, 1998). In the UK the Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards for pre-registration nursing education (NMC, 2010) include the ability of students to be able to use 'up-to-date knowledge and evidence to assess, plan, deliver and evaluate care'.

In the UK the nursing profession has developed into a degree entry level qualification and the delivery of programmes in higher education institutions (HEIs). In Slovenia the nursing profession is at the 1st Bologna cycle professional diploma degree level and is also delivered in HEIs.

Identifying elements of EBP and research within a pre-registration programme can be problematic as both concepts draw on a range of skills across a range of disciplines (Peckover and Winterburn, 2003). A review of pre-registration courses in the North of England found that in the first year EBP and research were taught simultaneously (Badger et al., 2012). The current curriculum for undergraduate nursing at the

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University of Greenwich involves the delivery of taught modules relevant to EBP and research across the three years of the programme. In the first year students are taught academic skills, such as the ability to access and utilise appropriate academic resources as well as applying these skills to academic pursuit and professional practice. In the second year students are taught the concepts of the nature of knowledge and the principles underpinning EBP as well as research methodology in healthcare, and how to critique this research methodology. In the third year students are taught critical enquiry in order to promote EBP care within clinical practice, encompassing ethical professional and anti-discriminatory issues. The students are required to critically review the literature in a defined aspect of professional practice and appraise the relevance of the conclusion to current clinical practice.

The current curriculum for undergraduate nursing at the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice involves the delivery of taught modules relevant to research in first year and third year of the programme. In the first year students complete a comprehensive module on research paradigms including approaches of quantitative and qualitative research, data collection, analyses and interpretation of population, sample, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. The module also encompassed the importance of research for nursing care, ethics and the ability to assess and critically analyse research on a selected subject matter. In the third year students nurses have the option of selecting a module on EBP, however all students participate in Diploma seminars. The seminars prepare the student nurse to apply research methodology to their final research project. Once the student nurses have completed their thesis they are required to defend their diploma work which has 10 ECTS.

Both undergraduate nursing programmes encourage and support students to publish their third year thesis, for student nurses studying at the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice this is in the Slovenian Nursing Review, which is peer reviewed journal. For student nurses studying at the University of Greenwich this may be in the Nursing Standard or another appropriate peer reviewed journal. Student nurses studying at the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice are also encouraged to present their work at professional conferences in Slovenia.

However, it has been acknowledged few nurses will undertake research during their clinical careers (Gerrish and Lacey, 2006). More recently, Forsman et al. (2012) found only a modest level of intention to use research evidence in a sample of 1319 newly graduated nurses. Further information is required to understand student nurses perspectives of EBP and research and how these are influenced throughout their 3 year programme. Undergraduate nursing programmes develop and change to meet the continually developing world of medicine and health, how these changes have impacted on student nurses perspectives of EBP and research is important to understand to ensure good practices are recognised, developed and incorporated into all undergraduate programmes.

**Aim**

The aim of the study was to explore student nurses' perceptions on and importance of evidence-based practice and research in relation to their current and future practice.

**Methods**

*Design*

The design of the study was informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) including the three concepts of; phenomenology (the study of experience), hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation) and idiographic (a particular person making sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2009)). The study was phenomenological to allow an exploration of how nursing students made sense of the EBP and research to their 'being' a student nurse and future healthcare professional.

*Participants*

Participants were undergraduate student nurses recruited from the University of Greenwich and the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice. Recruitment occurred across each of the three years of the programme. All students were completing full time studies. A total of 70 student nurses participated in 10 focus groups; refer to Table 1 for the structure of each focus group.

*Data Collection*

All focus groups were facilitated by the first author, although simultaneously translated for students from the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice, by the second author. A question route was applied with open questions such as; 'What is research?' 'What has research to do with nursing?' Focus groups, were small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions. Each focus group was composed of participants who were similar to each other (current year of studies and HEI). Focus groups provided a more natural environment because participants were influencing and being influenced by others (Webb and Kevern, 2001). The process for integrating focus group data into an IPA study has been developed and is well documented (Palmer et al., 2010).

*Ethics*

Ethical approval was obtained as per protocol from both the University of Greenwich and Faculty of Health Care Jesenice prior to recruitment of participants. Ethical approval was essential as nurse educators were involved in the recruitment of current student nurses. The authors took on a dual responsibility to these students, the concept of a dual role (Loftin et al., 2011) has been acknowledged in educational research. A participant information sheet and consent form were provided and explained to each student nurse prior to recruitment.

*Data Analysis*

Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data from the Faculty of Health Care Jesenice focus groups were transcribed in Slovenian and English. All data were collected prior to the commencement of analysis. The data was analysed applying the six stages of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Analysis commenced by the first author reading and re-reading the transcript from the first focus group to become familiar with the data. The next stage involved initial noting of points relevant to the research aim. Themes were constructed from the initial notes with constant referral back to original text. On completion of the development of themes, connections across themes were searched for.

**Table 1**  
Structure of each focus group.

Focus group	Higher education institute	Current year of programme	Number of participants
1	U of G	3rd	4
2	U of G	3rd	Removed as only one student volunteered
3	U of G	1st	7
4	U of G	1st	6
5	U of G	2nd	5
6	U of G	2nd	15
7	U of G	2nd	10
8	U of G	1st	4
9	FHCJ	1st	5
10	FHCJ	2nd	8
11	FHCJ	3rd	6

U of G – University of Greenwich.  
FHCJ – Faculty of Health Care Jesenice.

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